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L.A.youth

the newspaper by and about teens



25 YEARS OF L.A.YOUTH



L.A. youth

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TEACHERS TALK ABOUT L.A. YOUTH

“I have used L.A. Youth for 10 years and it has been an immeasurable resource for my struggling readers and hundreds of everyday teens who are looking for a way to connect with each other and the world. Thank you everyone who made this paper possible.”

JOLIE AUGUSTINE, WILSON MS (GLENDALE)

“Your paper was always RIGHT ON TARGET with issues we’re discussing, and the kids were amazed to see the authors are their age and from nearby schools.”

LISA ALVA, ROOSEVELT HS

“Thanks for a great publication by teens and for teens; today’s youth need to hear one another’s voices and know that many of them share common interests, face the same problems, and are confused about their futures.”

COLLEEN POELVOORDE, MADRONA MS (TORRANCE)

“Thanks for providing a wonderful source of reading material that kids like and can relate to. Boys even ask if they can have a copy to take with them.”

MILLICENT PRESTON, VAN NUYS MS

“Thank you so much for your publication. Many of my students come from homes with little to nothing in the way of printed reading materials in them so your newspaper has been read over and over.”

WENDY ESPARZA, AZUSA HS



COVER STORY:

Celebrating L.A. Youth's 25th Anniversary

We look back at our most popular topics with excerpts from our best work, and we highlight our most powerful art and hear from our alums who share their memories.

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Illustration by
Sydney Li,
16, Alhambra HS

What does it mean to be poor?
Six teens discuss how their families have struggled and how their views of poverty have changed.
PLUS: Poverty survey results
More than 1,400 readers told us about their views on poverty.

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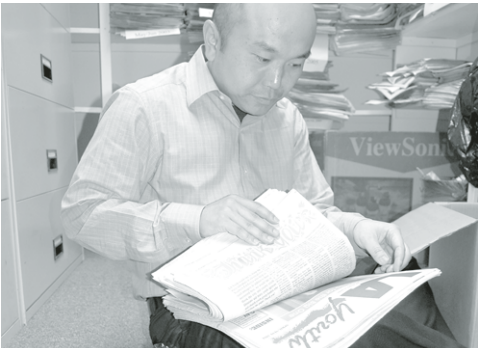
Check out our reviews of League of Legends, Halo 4 and Shadow of the Colossus.

CD reviews . . . 27

Our staff writers recommend Foster the People, Deadmau5 and Two Door Cinema Club.

BEHIND THE SCENES

It was a blast to look back at the work L.A. Youth has produced over the past 25 years. To get ready for the anniversary, editors Mike and Amanda read every issue, looking for some of our best work. We were amazed that except for hairstyles and fashion, not much has changed in the lives of teens, who back then also struggled with their identity, relationships, school and more. It was hard to select which stories to feature in this issue because there were so many great ones.



NOV-DEC 2012 ISSUE

A BOY LEARNED TO SALSA DANCE

THE ARTICLE "MOVING to the Latin beat" was inspiring. I like the way Tyler describes how his passion for dancing became stronger after every practice and performance. He knew from the start that it was going to be a challenge but he still went to tryouts and didn't give up. Even though he messed up during a big performance he still went to the others and practiced harder. Eventually he became one of the captains of his salsa team and performed in Brazil, which is amazing! I wish I could be as brave as him for doing something he's never done before.

Beatrice Torres

Hollywood HS

BUDGET CUTS MAKE IT HARD TO GET CLASSES

I WAS DEEPLY touched by reading Destiny's article, "My future's on hold." I am

only in eighth grade, but I want to have the assurance that working as hard as I do right now will open the doors to college for me. How disappointing would it be to find out that no matter how good one does in school, he/she may still not have the opportunity to take the classes they need—all due to budget cuts? I believe we need to make college accessible and affordable for students. After all, we are the future of our country, and what good is a country without educated people?

Aleen Tatavosian

Wilson MS (Glendale)

A GIRL'S SHYNESS HELD HER BACK

I REALLY ENJOYED the article about the girl being shy. I can relate in so many ways but fortunately I grew out of that stage. I remember being yelled at for not speaking up. I would get so upset because I'm like, "This is me and why am I being punished for being myself?" I've learned that if you don't

speak, you'll never be heard. I would like to suggest to those who are shy to just open up. It will be like a whole new chapter in your life.

Quenarii Lampkin

Hollywood HS

I CAN RELATE to the article "Painfully shy" by Jaanvi Sant. I was shy in middle school and even now. When she said it's hard to make friends at a new school, it reminded me of myself. She helped me realize that I have to try and not be shy. She shows that she's trying to not be shy too. Being shy keeps you from experiencing different things. I have slowly been trying to overcome being shy.

Tony Sanchez

Hollywood HS

HIKING IN L.A.

AFTER READING THE article "Nature close to home" I wanted to go hiking because all I do is stay home and play video games. At first I thought that going hiking was horrible but now that I have read this article I realize that hiking is awesome. I've also worried about going hiking because what if you feel that you might fall? I've felt that way sometimes when I go hiking. Your article inspired me and when I have the chance to go hiking, I will.

Christian Cortes

Pacoima MS

A GIRL DREAMED OF BEING A POP STAR

I CAN REALLY connect to the article "Pop star dreams." A couple years ago, I was crazy about K-pop singers and Korean actors. I wanted to become one of them one day. While I watched K-pop audition programs on TV, I realized that there are millions of talented people who have a dream of becoming a pop star. But unfortunately, only a few out of millions become famous in the end. I think that getting high grades and going to a good college would be a lot easier than becoming a pop star.

Yoora Jung

Wilson MS

GIVING ADVICE IN AN ONLINE FORUM

IT'S NICE TO know that there are people willing to help others. This article gave me a new perspective—I

should help others and give them advice because I might be doing something good for somebody.

Jaime Mora

Hollywood HS

A BOY STRUGGLED WITH OCD

I APPRECIATED THE article "Struggling with OCD" by Henry Studebaker. I have a form of OCD called dermatillomania (also known as compulsive skin picking disorder). It began at a young age, however it got worse in high school. My family members would say, "Just stop" or "Just don't do it" as though that would magically fix everything. Or they would tell me it was normal. I kept thinking, "Do most freshmen have to clean blood from under their fingernails every night?" After months of saying I wanted help, we finally made a doctor's appointment during the summer. My doctor diagnosed me with my condition. She referred me to a psychiatrist. Having someone I can talk to once a week feels great. I am more aware of what I am feeling and it makes me feel a little more in control.

I am still working on not scratching my skin all the time. My fingers are always itching to do it and it is difficult to curb this obsession. I am really glad Henry talked about the medications he took. I was offered medications to make me feel less inclined to act on my OCD. But I declined, fearful of how it would affect my academic performance. Henry mentioned that his medication made him very sleepy in class, and I worried that I would have similar side effects if I took the medication. With the AP class I am taking this year, my stress and anxiety are rising to difficult levels again, so I am battling my OCD harder than ever. It is nice to know that I am not alone.

Name withheld

THANK YOU FOR publishing the article "Struggling with OCD." I never realized how serious this condition is. It shouldn't be joked about and I now know how hard it must be to deal with it. Henry is so brave to share his story. I'm so happy he found help. No one should be dealing with this alone.

Katherine Duarte

Hollywood HS



Illustration by
Ruth Xu, 17,
Temple City HS

Gun violence has to stop

The shooting in Connecticut made me realize that we need to change our gun laws

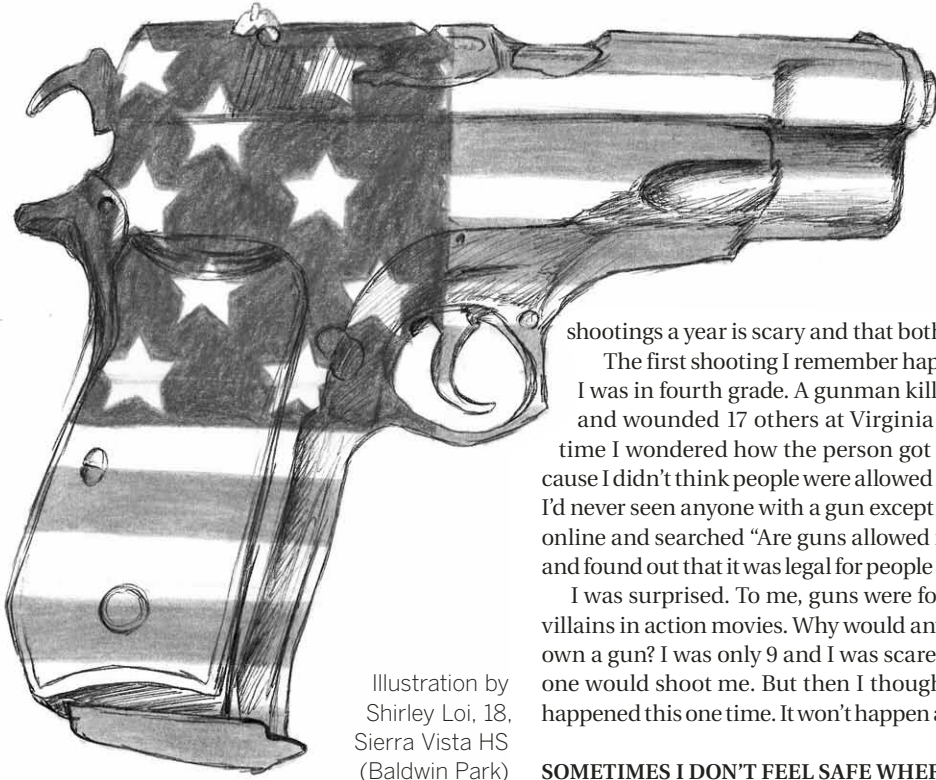


Illustration by
Shirley Loi, 18,
Sierra Vista HS
(Baldwin Park)

By Susie Park

16, Marshall HS

I was checking my email after school on Friday, Dec. 14 when I saw a headline saying that there was a mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. I immediately clicked the link and read that 20 little kids along with six faculty members were shot and killed by a 20-year-old man named Adam Lanza. I was shocked. Then I told my mom, who said, "Why children? There are so many crazy people in the world."

The rest of the weekend felt like it was following a script. My Facebook newsfeed filled with prayers and messages expressing grief. Then the president made a speech about how we're all sad and how we need to do something to make sure that shootings like this never happen again.

This was just like what happened after similar shootings in Tucson in 2011 and at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado this past summer. These shootings received lots of attention from newspapers and television and I'd read lots of coverage online. The shootings started to feel so common to me that they didn't scare or surprise me anymore. The fact that I expect one or two

shootings a year is scary and that bothers me a lot.

The first shooting I remember happened when I was in fourth grade. A gunman killed 32 people and wounded 17 others at Virginia Tech. At the time I wondered how the person got the gun, because I didn't think people were allowed to own guns. I'd never seen anyone with a gun except a cop. I went online and searched "Are guns allowed in America?" and found out that it was legal for people to own guns.

I was surprised. To me, guns were for heroes and villains in action movies. Why would anyone need to own a gun? I was only 9 and I was scared that someone would shoot me. But then I thought, "This just happened this one time. It won't happen again, right?"

SOMETIMES I DON'T FEEL SAFE WHERE I LIVE

I was wrong. I live in Koreatown, which is about four miles west of downtown Los Angeles. After the shooting at Virginia Tech, someone got shot near my apartment. And one day when I was in sixth grade, I noticed that the police had blocked the street I was on and a few minutes later I heard a police officer yell into a megaphone, "You're surrounded. Come out of the apartment." These blockades seem to happen once or twice a year. Also in middle school there was the time that a man with a gun was in the building of my after-school program. Helicopters surrounded the building and the police didn't let anyone in or out. Even though I knew that the police were there, being locked inside that building knowing that a man with a gun was on the loose terrified me.

It also felt like mass shootings were happening too often. There was the Virginia Tech massacre, U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords getting shot in the head and six others killed in Tucson, and then this summer James Holmes shooting and killing 12 people and injuring 59 people in a Colorado movie theater.

After the Sandy Hook shooting, I thought, "Why don't politicians try to prevent this from happening again?"

Two days later my aunt who lives in South Korea called. "Aren't you scared to live in America?" she asked. "It seems like people die from guns every day there."

"Not really, but it does frighten me a little." I said,

"Don't they have guns in Korea too?"

"No, we don't," she said. I was surprised by her answer. Since a lot of Americans owned guns, I assumed people in other countries did too. I researched more online and discovered that many countries don't allow citizens to own guns or they have much stricter laws about who can own them and the types of guns people can buy.

South Korea, where citizens are not allowed to own guns, and Japan, which has very strict gun control laws, have two of the lowest firearm death rates in the world. In 2008, more than 12,000 Americans were killed in gun-related homicides, while only 11 people were killed in Japan, which has about one third the population of the United States.

To get a gun in Japan you have to attend an all-day class and pass a written test. You also must pass a shooting range class. Then you undergo a mental health examination and drug test. And you must not have a criminal record. Once you own the gun you must also document for police where you keep the gun in your home, as well as the ammunition, both of which must be stored in separate locked boxes.

Seeing how hard it was to get a gun in Japan, I looked up California's laws. I learned that in California you don't have to tell the police where you keep your guns or where you keep the ammo. I wished our laws were more like Japan's.

If these countries can do it, why not America? Gun rights groups have argued that banning guns is unconstitutional because the Second Amendment guarantees citizens the right to own guns. I wish we could get rid of all guns in this country, but I know that won't happen. But I think we should at least make gun control laws similar to what they have in Japan or Australia.

In 1996 in Australia a shooter using two assault rifles killed 35 people. After that Australia banned assault weapons. There hasn't been a mass shooting since.

Assault rifles were used by the shooters in Aurora and Newtown, Conn. These types of weapons are very dangerous and should be banned. Something must be done to make things safer.



Susie hopes politicians will ban assault rifles and make it harder to get a gun so there will be fewer shootings.



The teens who took part in our discussion on poverty were Miguel Molina, Ana Muñoz, Chris Villalta, Jacqueline Uy and Daisy Villegas. In the photo at left are Frank Gaspar and Shivani Patel.



THE L.A. AREA IS HOME to a lot of very rich people and a lot of very poor people. But the number of people in poverty has gotten worse since the recession, especially among children. Today 22 percent of children in California live in poverty. We ran a survey in the October issue to find out what our readers' experiences were with poverty. Many of the more than 1,400 respondents indicated that their families were struggling financially, like having trouble paying rent or buying food, but only 3 percent said their family was poor. We thought it was interesting that so few people considered themselves poor, so we brought together some of our staff members to talk about their views on class and poverty.

These are excerpts from our discussion along with some of the answers from our survey.

What does it mean to be poor?

Teens talk about how their families have struggled and how their views of poverty have changed

Miguel Molina, 18, East Los Angeles College: My parents used the credit card a lot. They put themselves in debt in order for us to be comfortable.

Shivani Patel, 17, Whitney HS (Cerritos): It's my senior year so I'm applying to college. I found out our income is low. We qualified for waivers for a couple colleges. It was surprising. We're not as well off as I thought. I have the mentality of I can't apply to more than 10 colleges because of the financial burden. I can't make my parents spend that much.

Editor Mike Fricano: When you hear about poor people in America, what comes to mind?

Shivani: There are ranges of poor. Like my family, I thought they'd more or less be able to get me through college. But that's not the case. But I would never consider myself poor. I thought poor was your house is small and broken down, you have problems paying for stuff, you have problems getting Internet. As I've grown older I realize that there are many versions of poor, even if you look well off on the outside.

Frank Gaspar, 15, The School of Arts and Enterprise

(Pomona): I would think of the homeless people you see asking for money outside of the store.

Mike: Has that changed as you've gotten older?

Frank: There are different ways to classify poor. There's homeless, and then there's you have a home but there are certain things you don't have, like say your parents don't drive you to school, you walk to school. I know some friends who are like that.

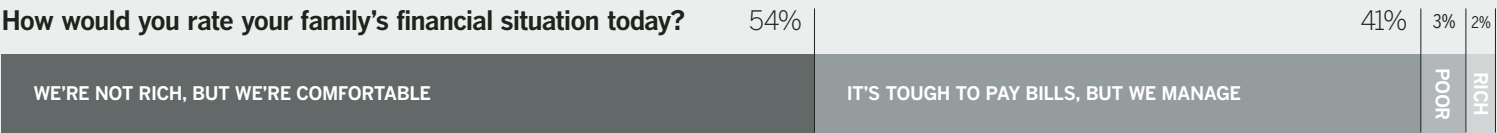
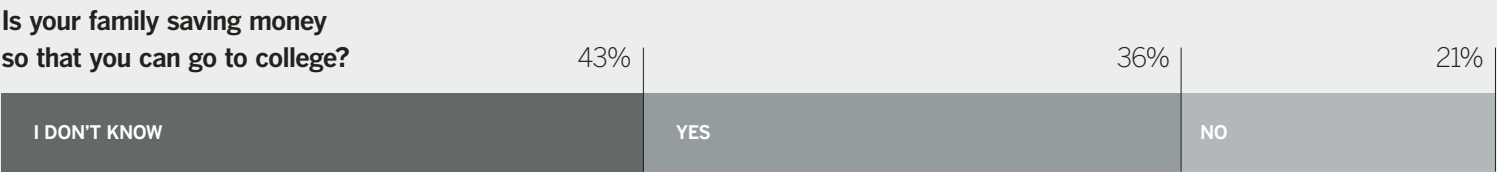
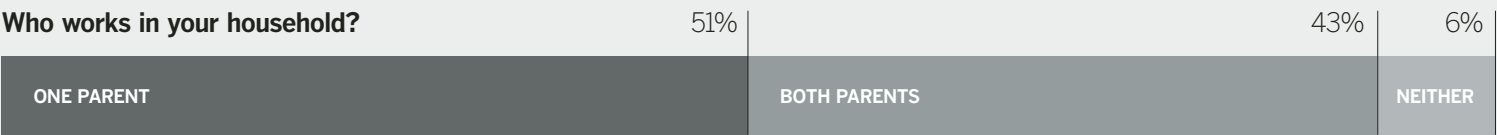
Daisy Villegas, 17, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies: I know for a fact that I am and I can't talk about it ever. My mom is a single parent. I feel now that I pressured my mom to make me go to private school because that's where all my friends were going and later when she said she couldn't do it anymore I understood. There is that huge stigma that you can't talk about being poor because it's looked down upon. Even some of my friends, they associate being poor with being ghetto and uneducated.

Jacqueline Uy, 15, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies: My dad is the only one who works in my family. When I was younger I always thought that we were

POVERTY SURVEY RESULTS

In October L.A. Youth asked readers what they think about poverty and more than 1,400 responded. Here are some of the answers from the teens who responded to our survey. We randomly chose three people to win \$100 for participating. They are: Debora Fernandez from Berendo MS, Alexis Zunigo from Monroe HS and Maci Garcia from Burroughs HS. Note: Some percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents checked all the answers that applied. Respondents were:

Gender: Female 59%, Male 41% • Ethnicity: Latino 72%, Asian 11%, Black 11%, White 10%



middle class because my dad was a nurse and he must have made a decent amount of money. But then when my mom started attending college information classes and learning about the tuition, my parents started talking to me about being realistic about where I want to go. They told me that they might not be able to put me through college so I would have to get a scholarship or get a loan. So I think being poor means you have to make a choice between education or graduating high school and getting a job immediately.

Chris Villalta, 16, S.E.A. North Hills: My mom's a nurse. I'm always at the bank whenever my mom goes. And I'll see the saving account and it's \$100. I never thought of me being poor. I always thought of me being fine. Thinking about it right now it's kind of bad because we recently lost the house. There's a buyer that's giving us a year there but if he wants he can kick us out and we're hoping that he doesn't.

Ana Muñoz, 15, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet: When I was young I didn't have any idea about what being poor was. As I got older, I started thinking about

it. There are some people who are struggling to buy food or even the people outside the 99 Cents Only store asking for money. I feel some pity toward people who are homeless or who can't afford food.

Miguel: To me what poor means is somebody whose parents can't afford college and where the student is forced to get a job in order to help their family out and whose parents are in debt. That's basically what I saw with my family. I always thought we were in a good position. I would see homeless people [and think], these guys are homeless, I guess we're not that poor. I never saw my neighbor in brand-name clothing and I saw myself with this clothing and I thought, I guess my neighbors have less than what we have. Then you start seeing the reality: you're all in the same position because you're all in the same place paying cheap rent and barely getting by. If you seem to have a bit more it's because your parents have gone into debt to provide things for you.

Mike: There are so many degrees of struggle. I think that's one of the reasons why a lot of the respondents in our survey didn't say their families were poor, even

when they said "we don't have health insurance, we struggle to pay for food." I think there is a sense of, but I'm not homeless. But is it bad that we think of the poor only as homeless?

Shivani: I think we should [have a broader definition]. We have a business. We have a manager and he struggles with paying bills, with getting food. He has a huge TV. He has all these little trinkets. You would think that having all these things he's not poor, he's middle class. At the same time he's struggling. It's not black and white at all. For some people it depends on what you prioritize.

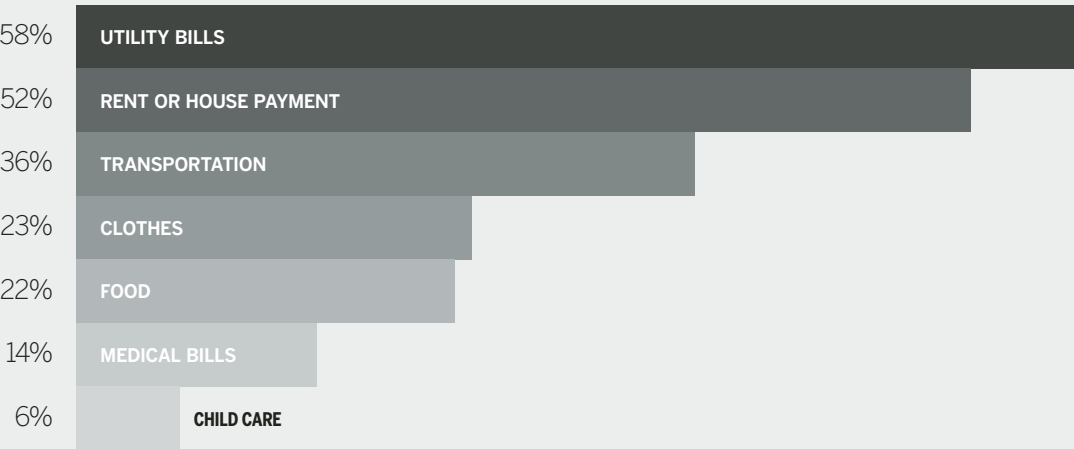
Mike: Why did you want to participate today?

Daisy: I finally wanted to talk about it. I understand what it means to be a type of poor but I've never been able to talk about it. I've never lived in a shelter, I've never been on that extreme end of it, but I feel it was important to have a different perspective as well.

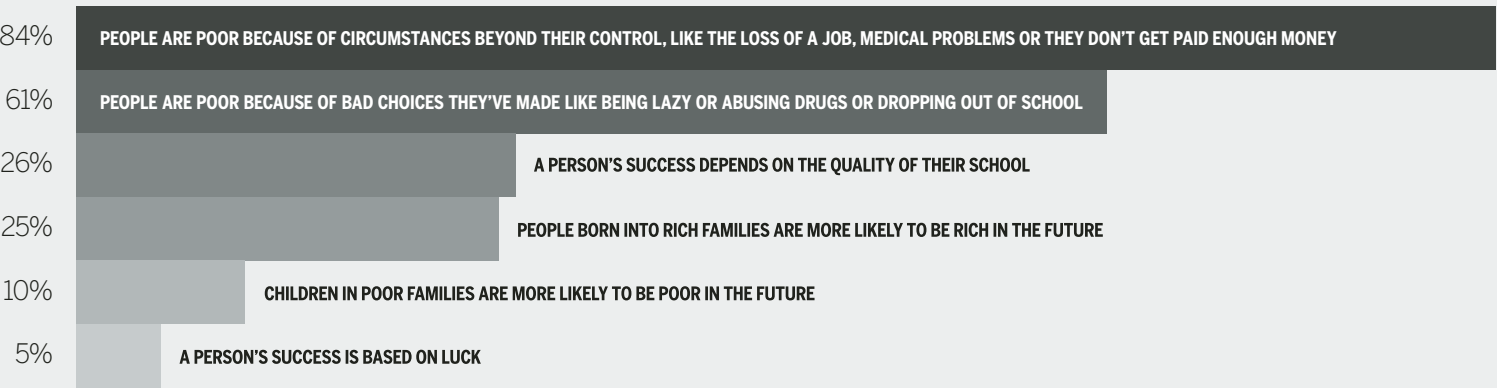
Jacqueline: This year I became a homeroom leader so I became a mentor for little kids. And when the free lunch program came around all of my kids were signed

POVERTY SURVEY RESULTS

Has your family had trouble paying for or been unable to pay for any of the following within the past year?



We asked respondents to check all of the statements that they agreed with:



up and they would tell me about their financial situations and problems at home, I thought to myself, “I didn’t know that it was like this.”

Miguel: I was struggling to figure out why my parents didn’t have that much money. During the 12th grade when I moved in with my aunt and uncle, I started to see everything they had and I’m like, “Why couldn’t my parents do it as well? Why couldn’t they make their own business like my aunt and uncle did?” I felt frustration about them not being able to provide the same life that my cousins have because their life seemed much easier than my life. My aunt and uncle get to go see their games when my cousins play. My dad couldn’t do that for me because he always had to work on Saturday. I guess it also tends to do with the age of my aunt and uncle when they got married. They got married at age 25. They already had this mentality of what they were going to do and this plan ahead of them. My mom got pregnant at a young age and my dad didn’t get to get an education.

Mike: I’m going to read these stats [from our survey]. Has your family had trouble paying for any of the fol-

lowing in the past year? Rent or house payment—52 percent had trouble paying for that; 36 said transportation they had trouble; 58 said utility bills; almost one in four had problems paying for food. Yet only 3 percent identified as poor. A lot of people said they struggled with things that are basics, yet only 3 percent identified their family as poor. Why do you think there’s such a big difference between those numbers?

Chris: Lots of people don’t want to be labeled as poor. So they try to go with something higher than poor, like middle class.

Frank: I think something related to that is what we were saying earlier: why do they have this gadget or technology if they need money for this? I think they want to have a phone so they aren’t classified as poor. They don’t want to be asked, “What, are you poor? Do you not have a phone?”

Jacqueline: Teenagers don’t want to be identified as poor. If you go to a school like mine where there are so many privileged kids, in the parking lot the parents will have the nicest cars ever. They’ll shop at Urban Outfit-

ters, \$50 clothes is not a big deal to them. You don’t want to say, “I got my clothes at Goodwill. I went to Payless to get my shoes for the next school year. I couldn’t even shop for clothes for the next school year.” It’s shameful. They’re going to look at you.

Ana: Maybe teenagers don’t want to admit that they’re poor because they think other people might find them less cool.

Frank: Or people may assume the stereotypes, like ghetto or they’re not smart just because they’re poor.

Jacqueline: My friend has the nicest clothes ever. She has all the gadgets and stuff. I was talking to her on the phone a few days ago. I wanted to apply to this program over the summer and we were supposed to do it together. But then she said, “I can’t afford that program. My dad got laid off and my parents are divorced so my mom can’t afford it on her own. She’s having problems paying rent right now.” I always thought she was rich because of the clothes she wore. After I found out, I thought, “You can’t really judge someone based on how they look.”

25 YEARS OF L.A. YOUTH

IT'S INTIMIDATING TO WALK THROUGH THE DOORS FOR THE FIRST TIME AT L.A. YOUTH, not knowing if our writing is good enough or if what we have to say is interesting. But right away we see that this is a place where we can share what makes us laugh, what makes us cry, what makes us angry, what inspires us, because this is our paper and what we have to say matters. From breakups and school stress, to family problems and questions about our identity, L.A. Youth helped show us that we're not the only ones going through these things, and that we can help you by sharing our experiences. This realization that we could change the world continues to guide us.

PRECIOUS SIMS

No matter how painful or even joyful your story is, always try to be detailed so that the readers can feel who you are through your words.

JEAN PARK

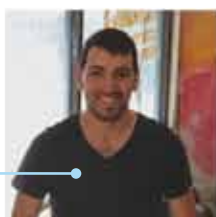
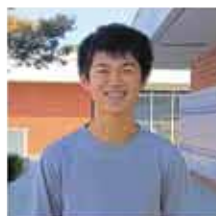
The most memorable moments for me were the weekly staff meetings because after two hours of discussing, debating and sharing thoughts, you realize that every issue concerning teenagers in Los Angeles has multiple perspectives.

JASPER NAHID

There's something really cool about getting to see a slice of someone's life from the perspective of a photographer. It put me in places I wouldn't have gone to otherwise and let me absorb a lot through the lens of my camera.

VALERIAN ZAMEL

My favorite memory is working with Libby Hartigan on a story about my father's death. I'd hit a sort of writers block with the story and we were sitting in the office, and she was asking me all these questions about the funeral. I suddenly started crying and Libby just sat there and patiently waited until I calmed down. After that, everything started flowing and I was able to describe the experience in a very honest and open way. It's not the happiest of memories but it's one I cherish. Sometimes you have to face difficult memories if you want to break through to something. That brainstorming session with Libby will be something I always remember.



Race & Identity



RENZO SAN JUAN, 16, BELMONT HS

When I was reading these stories I could see the good that L.A. Youth has done. It provides the opportunity for teens struggling with their racial identities to share their lives with other teens. Knowing that there are others who have similar struggles makes you feel like you're part of a community.

In "I'm American, I guess—or am I Chinese?" I could relate to figuring out how to fit in. I'm not exactly sure what I'd call myself. I came to the United States in 2008 from the Philippines. I've always just been Filipino but I don't think that's entirely adequate because I've been influenced more and more by American culture.

"Shattering stereotypes" is most relevant. There are still stereotypical jokes and the whole "Asians excel in academics" and "white people are rich" belief. Stereotypes should never define a race or culture. For Latinos, "My race doesn't hold me back" is a major boost. If people share his doubts, it could inspire them.

I could relate to the recent stories more than the older ones. I don't see teens struggling to find what it means to be black, like in "A darker shade of racism." And we don't have assemblies that share cultures that much. What I related to most about that story is the end where she was proud to know The Black National Anthem and sing along at the assembly. I could share her love of other cultures because I'm also really interested in other cultures.



Learning English was the only thing I cared about. A solid mastery of English would bring up my grades and help me make friends. And it could keep me from being teased and taunted by bullies at school. With every joke that my classmates played on me, they reminded me that I was in America now, and I had to be an American boy. It was a matter of survival. By the time I reached high school, people assumed I was born here 'cause I seemed so American. Finally I was being accepted!

From "I'm American, I guess—or am I Chinese?" by Vincent Hsia, 18, South Pasadena HS, November-December 2000



It's because I was just "tolerating" my white and Korean friends that I was able to put them down behind their backs. My friend who had wanted to "dress up" as a Chinese girl was maybe doing a little more than tolerating my heritage, but she wanted to regurgitate a stereotype, not learn anything new about my culture. Neither one of us took the time to understand each other's cultures because we believed the little understanding we had of them was enough to "tolerate" them. We should all try to learn what other people's cultures mean to them.

From "Shattering stereotypes" by Lia Dun, 16, Marshall HS, September 2008

I don't see why I have to wear Guess overalls, baggy jeans or earrings from the Crenshaw swap meet to prove to anyone that I am black. Why should I talk with an attitude, or use bad English? Yet I feel that if I did these things, other black teens would accept me more.

From "A darker shade of racism" by Nkechi Obioha, February-March 1992

I finally realized how sick I was of presentations that focused on the atrocities of whites to almost every other cultural group. Instantly disgusted with myself for thinking that, I suppressed these thoughts by telling myself, "Oh no, how awful," for I knew the full reality of what my ancestors had done was worse than what the people in the skit were showing us. These things are skimmed over in history class—treated as a statistic instead of something tragic and cruel.

From "Pride or Guilt? Ethnic assemblies can separate

us rather than bring us together" by Sarah Gustafson, 15, Immaculate Heart HS, September-October 1998

"I want you to do problem number five from tonight's homework assignment right now," my calculus teacher said. I started the problem but I got stuck on the first step. I had no idea what to do. "Why can't I get this?" I kept thinking. I looked around and noticed only white and Asian students. Even my teacher was Japanese. Was I really the only Latino in the room? It can't be, the magnet I'm in at Venice High is 43 percent Hispanic. I wondered why there weren't more in my class. One of the students turned around and said, "That was easy, huh?" It seemed like I was the only one stuck. Was it because I'm Latino?

From "My race doesn't hold me back" by Edgar Mejia, 17, Venice HS, March-April 2011

25
YEARS
OF
L.A. YOUTH

Gay & Lesbian



Looking back over these stories, I was surprised to see that things were so different just a decade ago. In "Opening my mind to gay youth," the writer wondered why people were gay and was worried that her friends would think she was gay, which she said was worse than being weird. This showed me how things are a lot more open and accepting now.

Even though there's been awesome progress, boys are still bullied in school for being gay or even acting feminine. Just like in "Gay and so alone" and "I couldn't take it anymore," there are boys at my school who are called "gay" and "faggot." I still hear people saying things like, "That's so gay." Thankfully, there have never been acts of violence against people who are gay like what the two writers experienced.

I was happy when I read "Proud to be here" because the writer finally seemed comfortable with himself. L.A. Youth has published stories about these issues because it makes teens more aware and schools more accepting.

CAMILLE DIDELOT-HEARN, 16, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

Now they are my homeboys. They hang out with us at the bus stops. We show them photos of us and our gay friends. I feel more comfortable knowing that I'm accepted. I do things I wouldn't do before, like wear a rainbow necklace or bring pictures of myself with my boyfriend.

I used to think they were savages, but now that I've gotten to know them, I see that they are different people than they were before. I think they were acting

like that because they thought somebody would say that they were gay if they hung out with us.

From "I couldn't take it anymore" by Trayvione Travis, 18, November-December 2007

That's when it hit me. I wasn't looking at them as individuals before the conference. In fact, I wasn't looking at much before this. I characterized people as either gay or straight, like separating whom I could or could not grow close to. I pretended these people weren't even there, when they definitely were. They were all around me. Listening to these people talk about the isolation from losing friends for being gay made me disappointed ... in myself.

From "Opening my mind to gay youth" by Elizabeth Del Cid, North Hollywood HS, January-February 2001

"Look! That guy's a queer!" One day, a boy tripped me in P.E. My skin ripped as I slid on the concrete, knees first. My P.E. teacher noticed my bleeding knees but I told him I fell by accident. I already had enough people who hated me; the last thing I needed was more people harassing me. Another time, during nutrition, some students called me names and threw pizza at me. I started to cry because I hated myself. I didn't hate them. They were normal; I couldn't hate something I envied.

From "Gay and so alone" by Marvin Novelo, 17, Franklin HS, October 2004

As we entered, I was surprised that about half the audience looked nothing like how gay men and women are usually portrayed in the media. There were big, burly men who seemed as straight as rulers, but had their arms around other men's shoulders. There were women who looked feminine and petite, talking to their girlfriends. Television and movies show gay men as skinny, with feminine accents. They talk like Valley girls, and wear incredibly tight clothes. Lesbians are all butch, large with short hair, maybe a piercing in the nose, or five piercings in both ears. Seeing that a lot of people were like me, not flamboyant, but wearing jeans and T-shirts, and not fitting the stereotypes, I felt more at ease.

From "Proud to be here" by Paul Uhlenkott, 18, Hamilton HS, January-February 2008

VOICES OF L.A. YOUTH



VINCENT HSIA

I learned I had a unique voice. It was always there, but I needed someone to show me that it was there and that I could bring it out with my own writing.

JOSIE VALDERRAMA

When I interviewed people, they treated me like a grown-up. It was different than how I was used to being treated by school authorities. It woke me up to how we get conditioned in school to be obedient, sometimes almost like prison inmates. I ended up clashing with some school officials because I started speaking out for better treatment.

SAUNTRIE ABELLERA

I met Tom Brokaw at an L.A. Youth tour!

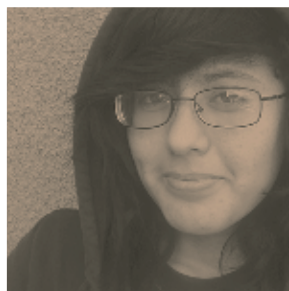
I learned to believe in myself, to not necessarily take no for an answer, and to keep questioning the status quo.

ELIZABETH DEL CID, ALUM

Whether I was writing in favor of treating juvenile delinquents like adults or about something less consequential like my beauty pageant nightmare, L.A. Youth encouraged me to speak up and tell readers why. I'm glad L.A. Youth told me not to shut up. My favorite memory probably is the Models of Pride conference because it opened my eyes to a new perspective. It forced me to stop being neutral about LGBT rights, and openly to be an ally and advocate which, back when I was in high school (almost 12 years ago), was kind of the uncool thing to do.



Foster Youth Writing Project



A lot of foster youth feel like they aren't heard by their foster parents and social workers, that when they say something it doesn't matter. But when foster youth write for L.A. Youth, they're able to express their feelings. They share their experiences and how they were able to cope with their struggles. By reading these stories, people will understand foster kids better. They come from broken families and bad experiences, they don't just act out because they're bad people.

In a few of the stories I felt the same way the writers did. They said, "here we go again" when they moved to a new foster home. It's hard to start over again, new family, new school. The reason why a lot of foster youth don't succeed in life is that they don't have support and motivation. "They got me through" shows that a good home is really important in a foster kid's life and can lead them to a better future.

**ISABEL DIAZ, 17,
ART THEATRE ENTERTAINMENT
SCHOOL (SAN FERNANDO)**

I was desperate for a getaway from my problems. In class a day or two later, I took a large safety pin, stuck it down hard on my arm and dragged it until it bled. The pain was soothing. Feeling the blood run down my arm took me to a natural high. It hurt, but it didn't hurt compared to what I was going through.

*From "Cutting away the pain" by Karina Onofre, 16,
The Linden Center, November-December 2004*



My life began changing in a positive way as soon as I moved in. My foster dad told me that my only responsibility was my education. I had been getting Ds in almost every subject. I liked school, but when I didn't understand something, I would easily give up. No one in my other foster homes helped me with my homework. My foster dad would sit with me every night to help me. After a few months, I became interested in school and became one of the top students in my class.

*From "They got me through" by Teresa Hidalgo,
18, Sierra Vista HS, September 2005*



I stayed in my room most of the time because I had nowhere to go and nothing to do. In that neighborhood, there are no parks for kids, no community centers, no after-school hangouts. It's not a normal community. It's an area where you put your outcasts. Next to skid row are high-rise buildings and prosperity. A few blocks separate skid row from the business area and the fashion, toy and jewelry districts. It amazes me. You have all these stores, banks and businesses, a Macy's, but once you cross Los Angeles Street you're in a totally different area. That's when you start see-

ing homeless people and prostitutes. Living there, I felt dumped on by society.

From "A world apart" by Roshawn Cornett, 18, Hillcrest Continuation HS, January-February 2006

When I was 14, I started to hear voices again. I'm not sure why, maybe it was caused by stress from arguing with my mom over little stuff. I'd hear screaming. It was worse than before, more violent and intense. For the second time, I grabbed a knife one day and held it in my hand in a trance until I dropped it. At the hospital the doctors said I might have schizophrenia. That made me really depressed. To be possibly diagnosed with a mental illness is scary. I wondered if I would be able to do normal things in my life.

*From "The voices no one else can hear" by
Brian, 16, November-December 2005*

At the table in the cafeteria, the other girls would tell stories of good times in their lives. The rules were that you couldn't talk about getting high or anything negative. I didn't have any stories. I couldn't remember a lot of times because I had been high. I missed out on life because I got into drugs at a young age. They would talk about going to the park and actually hanging out, not getting high. I started realizing my whole life was wrapped around drugs. All I could say was, "Me and my brother used to go skating in Panorama City." I don't know how people could stand talking to me because I always said the same thing.

*From "My life on meth," author's name
withheld, September 2008*

My clothes were dirty and ripped. I smelled like piss and body odor. I would eat out of garbage cans or steal food. Before I started living on the streets I was a good 135 pounds. I lost a lot of weight. I looked like a twig. I would go a few days without eating. For the first couple days I would be starving, but on the third day the hunger went away and I couldn't feel anything.

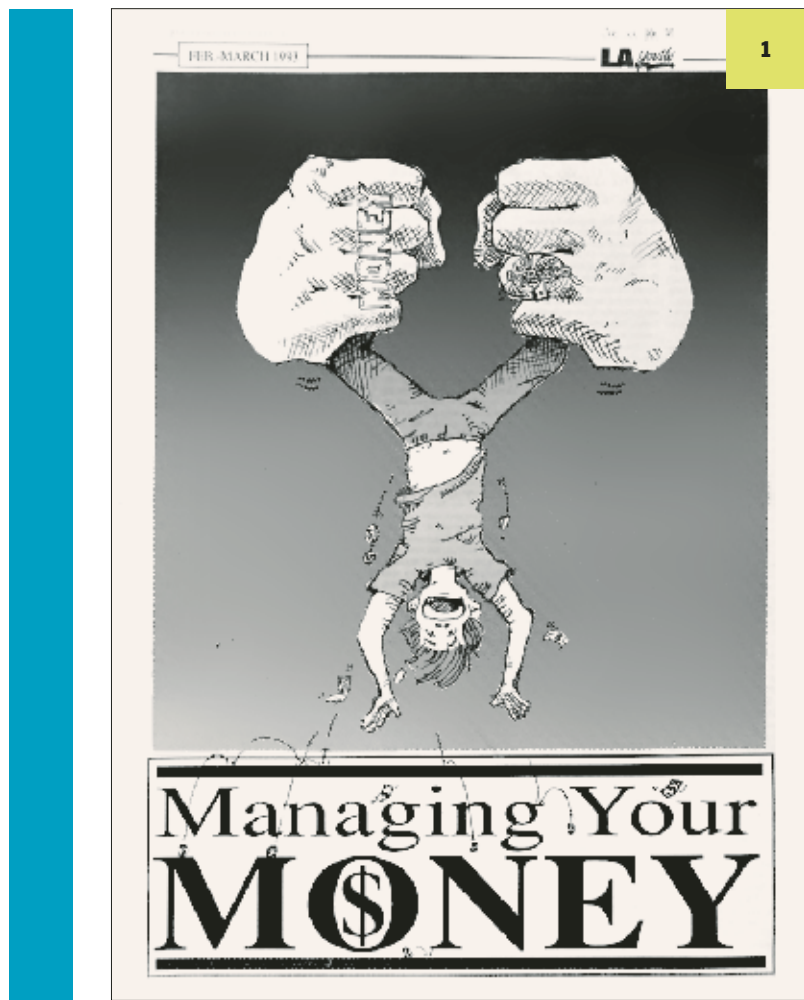
*From "My life on the streets" by William
Dominguez, 18, May-June 2005*



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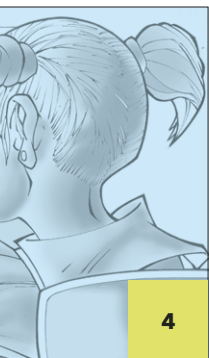


1 KOTY MUKASA, 1993, MOCCLES COLLEGE for a series of stories on money **2 LILY CLARK, 2003, IMMACULATE HEART HS** for a story on depression **3 BRIAN LOPEZ-SAN MARSHALL HS** for a story on the consequences of abuse **4 RODRIGUEZ, 2003, CERRITOS HS** for a story about a girl trying to fit in **5 LUISA MENDOZA, 2003, LYNWOOD HS** for a story on identity and school **6 HOWARD CHAPMAN, 2003, NARBONNE HS** for a story on abuse **7 BRIAN LOPEZ-SAN MARSHALL HS** for a story about stereotypes **8 THOMAS HOEHL, 2003, DON BOSCO TECHNICAL INSTITUTE** for a photo essay on how teenagers spend their summer nights **9 MARLON GARCIA, 1994, FRANKLIN HS** for a cover story about graffiti **10 BEN SANDERS, 2003, CITY HS** for a cover story about hearing voices in his head **11 SAMUEL, 2007, TEMPLE CITY HS** for a story about a teacher who criticizes schools for teaching about money

Art



25
YEARS
OF
L.A. YOUTH



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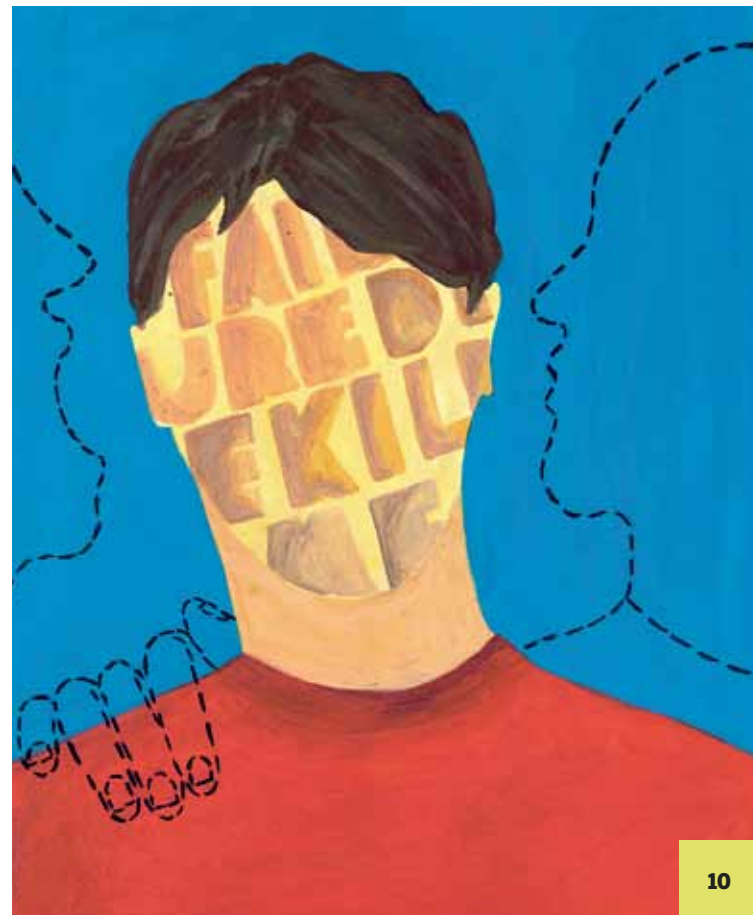
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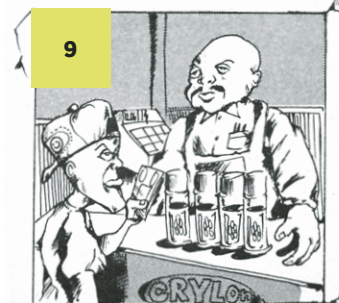
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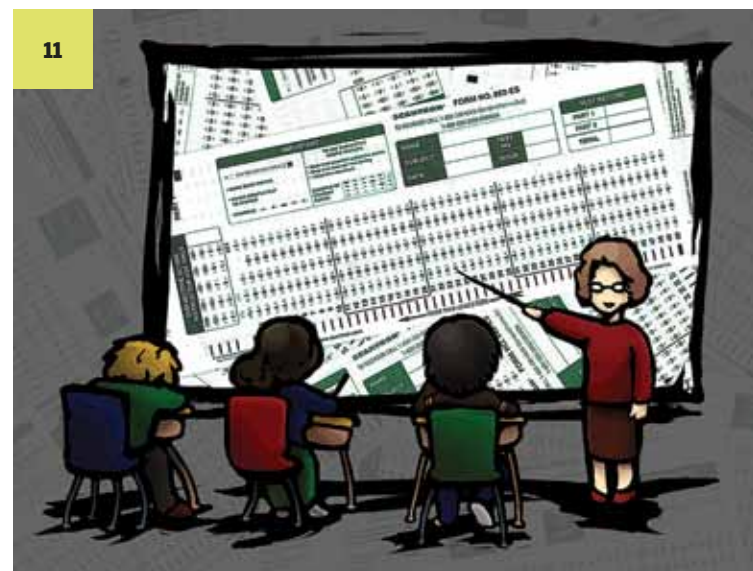
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11

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Heartbreak is something every teen knows. "I just like you as a friend" was a really relatable story, because everyone knows that awful feeling of rejection. I liked "Just friends' forever" because it was funny and talked about being "friend-zoned." It was a story that takes a lot of guts to admit.

It's been really important that L.A. Youth write about all sides of relationships, even the bad sides, to let teens know what to do if that sort of situation happened to them or a friend. "He seemed like the perfect boyfriend..." is about teen dating violence, which is still a problem.

It's comforting knowing that you're not the only one having problems. The wide range of stories in L.A. Youth covers almost every situation that teenagers have been in.

CAMILLE DIDELOT-HEARN, 16, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

Relationships

Then I remembered a girl I used to like a few years ago. She was still around. I agonized over how to approach her. First I sent her a Valentine. She came up to me and said, "Oh, that was very sweet." That seemed like a green light, so I started following her around. I noticed where she parked her car. One day I waited for her by her car. "Um ... I was just wondering if you would like to go out with me sometime?" She looked down at the ground and (while I was planning our marriage and what to name our kids) she said, "Sorry, I already have a boyfriend." I smiled politely, feeling so small that a cockroach could feast on me. As I walked away, I bit my big, white notebook

as hard as I could, leaving huge tooth marks.

From "I just like you as a friend" by Daniel Weintraub, 18, Beverly Hills HS, March-April 1997

The first stage of the friend zone is denial. As we got closer, he started to ask me for advice about girls. On the phone he would say, "Oh man, I just farted." Are you serious? I'm a girl too, can't you hold back a little? I convinced myself that he mentioned girls to make himself seem unavailable, and therefore more desirable.

From "Just friends' forever" by Michelle Paik, 16, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS, May-June 2008



Her best friend told her to leave him but she was so confused. Sometimes he was really sweet and she didn't want to leave him. Other times, she was angry but she thought she loved him. She didn't want to see him get beat up by somebody or arrested by the cops. She couldn't really tell her parents—they thought he was a "nice boy." When he hit her, it made it hard for her to think clearly, and she'd start to believe what he said. "He brainwashed me," she said.

From "He seemed like the perfect boyfriend..." by Julissa Espinoza and Christy Buena, Los Angeles HS, March-April 2000



VOICES OF L.A. YOUTH



CONNIE CHUNG

One of my favorite memories is making egg rolls and vegan chocolate chip oatmeal cookies for a party and then publishing the recipes in the paper, but mostly, eating what other people brought (like Guianna's guacamole!).

BEETA BAGHOOLIZADEH

I kept reading L.A. Youth because the mainstream media usually neglects opinions from the younger generation. Sometimes it feels like the only mention of high school students is screen shots of racist tweets, even though we know that these rants aren't representative of the youth voice. L.A. Youth reminds us that to hear their voices, all we need to do is pick up a paper and read.

HASSAN NICHOLAS

When I was working alongside youth writers to conceptualize the art for their articles, it put me in this collaborative process that was foreign to me. It wasn't just about my ideas but rather re-imagining someone's words and thoughts into a visual representation. It felt like work to me, but in a good way. My job as the artist was to create something to complement the article, not overshadow it.

STEPHANY YONG, ALUM

After my first L.A. Youth meeting, I was pretty sure that not only was I boring, I had no story to tell that people would find interesting. However, L.A. Youth emphasizes how everyone, even the boring square like me, is significant and that these young voices have value and are worth listening to.



EMILY BADER, 16, CLEVELAND HS (RESEDA)

I really enjoyed reading these stories because they're about important issues from a teen's point of view. All of the stories were written over a long period of time because they had to do research and interviews. I was surprised how in depth the stories were, and how much time and work went into them.

Sometimes, things like the lack of resources at schools ("My school deserves better and so do I") and the juvenile court system ("A day in court") are brought up in big newspapers like the Los Angeles Times, but many teens don't read them, so having these stories in L.A. Youth is important. These stories also included the thoughts of the writers, which made reading them a lot more interesting and relatable than something you'd read in the L.A. Times. To anyone who hasn't experienced police brutality or been forced to go to a mental hospital, those issues are much easier to understand if you're able to hear the voice of another teen.

The story that I related to the most was Gohar Galyan's story about her school. I go to a public school and I face the same problems that she talked about, like how my classes have way too many people and sometimes people have to sit on counters or stand against the wall. Hearing her thoughts and her conversations with teachers and administrators was interesting because a lot of the time, I get the same responses from the people at my school. It can be discouraging, so it was nice to hear from another teen who has experienced the same thing. It was sad that 15 years later, everyone still gives the same "It's not my fault" response and nothing ever gets done.



The teens in juvenile court were like any other group of kids—all different. Some shot daring looks at the judge or slouched, but there were also teens dressed in ties and button-up shirts, sitting up straight with nervous respect, addressing the judge as "ma'am." Even though the teens seemed less violent than I had expected, their charges surprised me. I couldn't believe that a 12-year-old could be charged with a sex offense, or that a gang member would tattoo his gang symbol on the back of his head.

From "A day in court" by Selina MacLaren, 17, West Valley Christian Jr./Sr. HS, November-December 2006

It's a shame people living no more than two miles apart can live in two totally different worlds. I think kids who commit crimes have to answer for themselves. But at the same time, the way our society deals with this problem is not right. As I look at the criminal justice system, I see that it's set up only to put more people in jail. They set rules to make sure that if you mess up once, you mess up for life. It bothers me that the way we deal with crime is hurting youth, especially in minority communities. Youth don't have enough education or opportunities, and when they mess up, they're not given a second chance.

From "Is there justice for juveniles?" By Nicholas Williams, 17, Daniel Murphy HS, January-February 2000

Teenagers are getting committed every day. And for some—especially those who don't really need hospitalization, or need only limited care—they must fight their own lonely, and sometimes desperate, battles. "I don't know what the answer is," said Howard Kerner, Assistant Deputy, psychiatric section of the L.A. District Attorney's Office. "[But] I don't think the answer is locking them up in psychiatric hospitals."

From "The nightmare of teen patients' rights" by Joy Shiohita, October 1988

Despite gang members being violent, I had always figured that they were normal people with feelings just like you and me. [Officer Chuck] Drylie, however, viewed violent teens and gang members as heartless, completely cold to others' suffering. He blamed some of these teens' behavior on their parents. He said some parents do not know how their kids spend their time; they don't even know what their child's bedroom looks like. "Gangs commit destruction ... they don't do charity work," he said. Maybe Drylie's point of view is correct. He sees violence on a daily basis, while I do not.

From "Another day, another death" by Jennifer Clark, March-April 1999

News & Investigations



I talked to two school board members, my principal, one of my teachers and Mr. Collins and at the end one thing became clear: everyone is pointing fingers and no one seems to want to take responsibility. The teachers and administrators say the students are responsible for getting a good education. The administrators and students say some of the teachers aren't doing a good job. The teachers

and students don't think the administrators care. Everyone thinks that the system is falling apart. Amidst all this clamor one thing seems to get lost: a good public education.

From "My school deserves better and so do I" by Gohar Galyan, 17, Marshall HS, November-December 1998

These photos were taken during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riots broke out after white police officers were acquitted of beating Rodney King during a traffic stop. The beating was recorded on video. One of our teen photographers captured three young people getting arrested after they broke the windows of

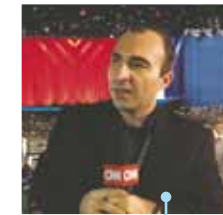
a department store at Wilshire Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue near our old office. They had come with about 30 other young people, carrying baseball bats, steel rods, axes, beer bottles and bottles filled with gasoline. The others fled when police arrived; these three were caught and required to lay on the asphalt while they were handcuffed. Then they leaned across an unmarked police car while police questioned them. Their car was confiscated and they were taken away in a police car. Accord-

ing to the L.A. Times, the riots left 58 people dead and caused millions of dollars in damage from looting and fires.

From "Wreaking havoc," a photo essay by Prisco Serrano, June-July 1992



VOICES OF L.A. YOUTH



NOVA SAFO

Perhaps my favorite memory is my very first with L.A. Youth. On my first day at the newspaper, I was somehow convinced to get dressed in a grungy outfit to model for a fashion shoot for that issue. The chance that the resulting photo, tucked away in L.A. Youth's archives somewhere, might surface again some day still keeps me awake at night.

JESSICA MARIN

The weekly meetings were fun since everyone got a chance to speak and the editors were funny. Working one-on-one with the editors was great and it definitely improved my writing.

SAMANTHA RICHARDS

If you feel passionate about something, don't be afraid to let others know how you feel. L.A. Youth is a safe place to share your thoughts, ideas and beliefs.

BRYNN HOLLAND, ALUM

My favorite memory is working late at night with my editor at the time, Libby, on my piece about why I opposed invading Iraq. I remember being hungry and tired and sitting next to Libby editing and rewriting. It was such an important time and an important piece and I was given so much attention and care while writing it.

AMBAR ESPINOZA, ALUM

I thought I wanted to be a celebrity journalist when I first pondered the idea of being a reporter. I quickly learned at L.A. Youth that there are so many important issues to cover and stories to tell. Covering those stories would have a greater impact in helping my community than covering celebrities.



The teenage years are a mix of mature and immature behavior. The teens in these stories have serious and rational thoughts while also reverting back to childish humor. It's the combination of sophisticated analysis and something that would make a 7-year-old crack up that makes these stories so great.

Like in "My so-called boobs," the writer goes from talking about women being comfortable with the size of their breasts to being in a store and trying on the Miracle Bra. She and her friend keep going on about how their boobs have just expanded amazingly. "Where did my feet go?"

In "Beautiful butts" the teens she interviewed share stupid pickup lines but also talk about being respectful and not just spouting those lines to a stranger; they only use them with someone they're familiar with. But some of it was dated. The first two words caught me off guard: "Step out Baywatch babes." I've heard "watch out" but not "step out."

In "Why Museums suck" it's him being rude, like laughing at old people running into each other, but there are decent arguments between his comments about how museums suck. The fact that he got distracted so much during the article was really funny, like how the hot dogs were expensive or the tour guide was hot so he couldn't pay attention.

NICHOLAS ROBINSON, 17, CORTINES SCHOOL OF VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

Funny



I got discouraged because I couldn't even get hired at McDonald's. I felt like a loser and began getting desperate. I thought about washing cars, selling burned CDs, babysitting, pursuing an acting career or making a demo. None of those things would have worked for me though, because I was a talentless, underage, spoiled wimp of a girl who wouldn't even wash my own car, so I knew I had to be more realistic.

*From "Want to get cursed out and hung up on?"
by Nicole Bryant, 18, Fall Jobs 2003*

We were at Victoria's Secret hunting for the Miracle Bra. We both had seen it on TV, but it wasn't enough. We had to meet it, touch it, smell it, experience it. When we finally found the technicolor display table, we eagerly secured bras in our sizes. Adele's was pine green. Mine was barfy purple. In my dressing room, I tore off my shirt and Jockey bra with the force of a sinning priest. Snap went the Miracle, on went my shirt and out popped my eyes.

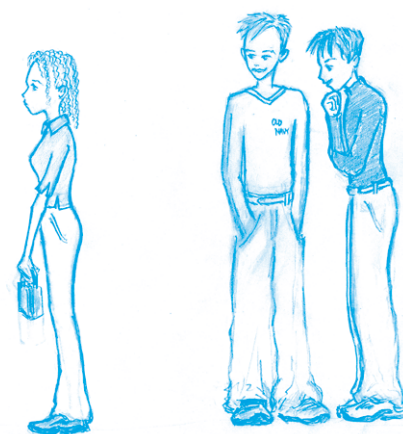
*From "My so-called boobs" by Sherry Lee, 17,
Whitney HS, September-October 1995*

When you go to museums, you don't get to laugh, unless it's at the stupid paintings and how much they cost. The artist will put some blotches of paint on a canvas, give it some stupid name, and the painting will end up costing around \$1 million. I don't get it. Why do they do stuff like that?

I could make up a painting with blotches of paint and call it some stupid title like, "Inside the

mind of an L.A. Youth writer." Then I would say some French guy painted it. And BAM!—an easy million dollars. That's not art.

*From "Why museums suck" by Howard Hwang,
15, Marshall HS, Fall Arts Guide 2001*



And if some girls are considered arm pieces, then their butts are trophies. There's always that type of guy who needs a pretty girlfriend to boost his ego. Butts are no exception. Guys know that they will get props for their girlfriends' nice booties.

"A booty is like a flower," said Joe Castellanos, 16. "The best booty gets the best guy ... the best flower gets the best bee."

*From "Beautiful butts" by Ambar Espinoza, 17,
University HS, November-December 2000*

THESE ARE THE ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS WHOSE WORK FROM OUR ARCHIVES APPEARS ON THESE ANNIVERSARY PAGES.

Alia Aidryalieva, Bravo Medical Magnet HS ■

Paulina Ayvar, Westchester HS ■ **Shengul Bajrami**,

University HS ■ **Raymond Carrillo**, Polytechnic HS (Sun Valley) ■ **Lily Clark**, Immaculate Heart HS ■ **Sarah**

Evans, Temple City HS ■ **Jing Jin**, University HS

■ **Matt Jones**, Los Angeles Center for Enriched

Studies ■ **Zack Lieberman**, John Adams Jr. HS

■ **Hassan Nicholas**, Hamilton HS ■ **Christina**

Quarles, Willows Community School (Culver City) ■

Kyle Rothfeldt, Van Nuys HS ■ **Prisco Serrano**,

Manual Arts HS ■ **Terrenz Vong**, Nogales HS

(La Puente) ■ **Manuela Yim**, Fairfax HS

25
YEARS
OF
L.A. YOUTH

I don't need a boyfriend

After seeing my friends' relationship drama, I'm happy to be single

By **Sydney Chou**

17, Sonora HS

I like Friday nights. Not because it's the start of the weekend but because I get to do whatever I want. I try to get easy homework assignments out of the way then I read fashion blogs or watch YouTube, practice my oboe or eat. Occasionally I hang out with my friends, when we're not super busy and we can get rides.

One thing I don't do on Friday nights is plan anything special with a guy. Seeing my friends get so caught up with wondering what they should say to their boyfriends to keep them happy, makes me happy I'm single. When they're constantly asking me what they should do when their boyfriends smile at them or what it means when "he always looks at me when I look at him," I don't know what to say.

One of my friends had a boyfriend who made her feel as if she didn't love him enough. She wanted to make school her priority while dating him. So in response he would take her aside every few weeks and complain that he didn't feel like she loved him anymore. He then would keep asking her if she still loved him for the entire lunch period. She even felt like she had to come up with a creative way to ask him to the Sadie Hawkins dance (a dance where the girl asks the guy) because he asked her to homecoming and prom with notes inside moon cakes (a Chinese dessert). If two people are dating why are they competing to find cuter ways to ask each other to dances?

I ONCE DREAMED OF PRINCE CHARMING

My relationship history is not interesting. I've never been asked to a dance or been asked out. When I was a freshman, I had those fantasies of falling in love with someone tall, good-looking and smart, even though the upperclass girls said that none of those kinds of guys existed at school. They would then point out the guys who cheat, the guys who spread rumors and the guys who try too hard to get noticed. At first I didn't believe them and thought that there had to be some-

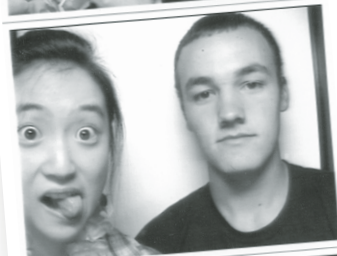


Sydney hopes that guys in college won't be as immature as they are in high school.

one in school who fulfilled some of my expectations, but I haven't found one.

During sophomore year, I felt like the conflicted girl in a teen novel. I had feelings for different boys at different times but I would always end up in their "friend zones," which sucked. I rarely got text messages from boys first and if I did, it was mostly about homework. One guy told me that he liked when I put my bangs down. So I wore them down sometimes just to make him happy. He never asked me out and my bangs kept falling over my eyes and it was annoying to keep pushing them back. I realized I was trying too hard to

Sydney had fun hanging out with her other single friends and taking goofy photos at a school dance.



make someone else like the way I look. I can't believe I worried over something that small.

Some of my girlfriends worry about getting asked to school dances because they think that going stag (a group of friends without dates) looks lame. Wrong. The good part about not getting asked to a dance is that I don't have to worry about which dress or shoes to wear. I hate dresses. I also have a fear of wearing open-toed shoes because I'm afraid people will step on my feet.

I have gone stag to two Sadie Hawkins dances and I have worn shorts or jeans and T-shirts along with a pair of Converse. I felt comfortable and worry-free because I did not have to watch out for my toes.

Every year my school has "Hula Hawkins." I went with a group of three close friends and my mom bought us Hawaiian BBQ for dinner and bought us leis to wear. Because I was in ASB, I had to be there early and so my friends and I were the first ones at the dance. We headed straight for the line-less photobooth. We took pictures again and again and we made the weirdest faces and poses.

As a junior last year, I loved the freedom that came with being single. Sometimes I eat an entire Trader Joe's chocolate bar, while some of my friends who are in relationships are worried about gaining weight and if their boyfriends will notice. I love how I can wear multiple shirts on top of one another and finish it off with a jacket and scarf when it's cold without worrying whether boys will think it's cute.

This past Valentine's Day my parents asked me if any guy had given me flowers or a box of chocolates. No. But I wasn't sad. Instead of celebrating all the couple-love shown by the obnoxious people at my school who were carrying balloons, flowers and boxes of chocolates, I celebrated my best friend's birthday, which is on Valentine's Day, and also "Single-Awareness Day," which I learned about from my other single friends. Although the acronym for that is S.A.D., I felt happy because I rewarded myself with lots of chocolates and sweets.

For those in relationships, good, I'm happy for you. But I just wanted to remind other single people like me that it's not a bad thing to be single and that there are many other single people in the world.

Finding the confidence to speak up

I'm no longer the quiet kid in class thanks to my new school

By Kari Vides

14, New Village Charter HS

When I was in middle school I wasn't a model student. I never raised my hand to ask questions or volunteer to answer them. I wasn't focused and I was addicted to gossip. I would spend lots of time in class passing notes and whispering to my friends.

As a young kid, teachers told my parents I was outgoing and bright. But in sixth grade I got interested in boys and gossip and in seventh and eighth grades these became my priority. I was so consumed by boys and gossip in class that I stopped listening to my teachers, so I didn't want to ask questions that showed everyone else that I wasn't paying attention. I thought that would make me look dumb and I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of boys. So I became one of the quiet students in the classroom.

When everyone had to answer a question, I would wait to the end so I could repeat someone else's answer, even if it wasn't what I thought. We had just finished reading *Of Mice and Men* and the teacher asked us if we were in George's shoes, would we have killed Lenny to save him from suffering. Almost everyone said they would have killed him. I would have encouraged Lenny to run, but I was too shy to say that. If I had said I disagreed I might have had to talk even more about my opinions, which I hated doing. So when it was my turn to speak, I agreed with everyone else.

One time my English teacher asked me to read a paragraph. I began and then my teacher interrupted. "Can you please speak up, sweetie?" she said. "I can't hear you." I was embarrassed, because it was true. I tried my best not to be so quiet, but I was so shy that I just couldn't. My teacher had to ask me to speak louder every time I had to talk that year.

Speaking in front of the class felt like a death sentence. I got so nervous that if I didn't understand something I knew was important, I would ask my friends to ask the teacher for me. Or I would make my teachers come to my desk and I would whisper my questions to them.

During eighth grade, I started liking this guy who

was a friend of mine and he liked me, too. We talked and passed notes in class a lot. I even failed a few science tests because I didn't pay attention. The only reason I got a B+ in that class is because I was able to do extra credit. Without extra credit my grade would have been in the D range.

MY TEACHERS WERE FRUSTRATED

Sometimes a teacher would say in front of the whole class: "How can I not hear you now, but I can hear you when I'm across the hall when you're talking to your friends?" That would make me think about how I wanted to change, but it seemed impossible.

Right away this was a different kind of school. During the first week one of my teachers, Mr. Shin, emphasized to us that we had to speak out. He told us, "It's important that you understand what you're learning because if you don't, then what are you doing here?"

I worried about trying to change because I thought that my classmates would think I was being fake and trying to be someone I'm not. I didn't know how other people felt about me and changing might make them not like me.

My parents wanted a new school environment for me. They didn't think I was getting challenged enough and they also wanted me to get over my shyness. Most of my middle school classmates were going to the high school that was run by the same charter organization, but my parents decided to send me to a different school, New Village Charter High School.

When we went to an orientation my dad asked if the school helped improve public speaking and how. They told him about the yearly "exhibitions," which are pre-

sentations that require us to speak in front of students, parents and teachers. These sounded horrible to me. But after hearing this my dad's mind was made up—I was definitely going to New Village.

I was so angry that I told my dad, "Don't think that I'm going to be doing that because I don't care if I fail." I didn't want to go to New Village. I was upset that I was leaving my friends and that this was an all-girls school.

I figured the education would be fine, but socially it wouldn't be the same. When I was younger I imagined that when I went to high school, I'd have a boyfriend who would wait for me outside of my classes and we'd go to dances. But I thought New Village would be a gossipy environment (girls can't help it) and it would be hard to find people to trust.

Throughout the summer, I tried to get my parents to let me go to the same high school as my friends. I told them about how my friends said the high school had great teachers. I told my parents I would get good grades and focus on school. It wouldn't be like middle school when I goofed off too much and never spoke up in class. But their decision was final.

A few days before the first day of school, it hit me that I was definitely going to New Village. I could choose to be upset or I could be the student I'd always wanted to be. I decided that when school started I would speak loud enough that my teachers could hear my voice and I would ask questions for myself. I knew if I didn't change I would look back and regret wasting four years of high school. I wouldn't learn anything and then I wouldn't get into college and I wouldn't get a good job and I wouldn't be able to support myself.

The day before school started I was nervous. How was I supposed to talk in front of everyone without being afraid?

But I was determined to change. Right away this was a different kind of school. During the first week one of my teachers, Mr. Shin, emphasized to us that we had to speak out. He told us, "It's important that you understand what you're learning because if you don't, then what are you doing here? You're going to fail classes just because you don't want to ask something."

I had never heard a teacher say we would fail if we didn't do something. Mr. Shin's speech was so straight up with us. It made me realize that being afraid of asking questions or even sharing my own opinions is a big problem. From that point on I knew I had to speak

up. I needed to be a new Kari who talked in class even if I was afraid.

I OVERCAME MY NERVES

About a week later I got my chance. Mr. Shin had us play a vocabulary game. He would say a word from our vocabulary list and we had to give the definition and use the word in a sentence. If we got one right we would win a glow-in-the-dark bracelet. I had my eye on the pink one. I had doubts, though, and felt like my voice was going to crack as soon as I spoke. I thought to myself, "What would the new me do?" The new me would participate in class discussions.

Mr. Shin said the first word, "*bonhomie*," which I knew meant cheerful and friendliness. My hand shot straight up and so did a bunch of the other girls'. Mr. Shin looked at me with wide eyes and was nodding his head that I had raised my hand. He saw that I was first and called on me.

I was nervous but I knew the answer and I knew how to use it in a sentence. "Bonhomie means friendliness," I said in my normal speaking voice. And then I used bonhomie in a sentence. I was surprised I was able to get up enough courage to say it out loud.

I answered a couple more and realized speaking in class wasn't a big deal. When the other girls started telling me, "You're so smart," I felt good. I won the bracelet and two others. That game was the push that I needed to become more confident. After that, I asked questions when I didn't know something and I would volunteer to answer questions without worrying if I was right or wrong.



The small classes and not having boys around helped, too. There are usually only about 10 students in my classes, so when we have discussions Mr. Shin calls on us when we haven't spoken. And without boys I don't worry about sounding stupid in front of anyone.

I still had challenges though. For our midterm exhibitions we had to talk about our backgrounds and interests for 45 minutes in front of our classmates and teacher. I thought it would be easy so I didn't prepare.

But once I got in front of my class I froze. When I saw everyone staring at me I couldn't stop thinking that I was going to mess up. When I saw Mr. Shin writing notes I assumed he was writing something bad. I was so nervous that I started feeling dizzy. I spent the whole 45 minutes sitting in my chair hugging my knees



to my body. When I tried to speak louder, I couldn't. It was like I went back to being middle school Kari. Mr. Shin said that sitting curled up into a ball made it look like I was hiding. He was right.

When I found out I'd have to give another exhibition at the end of the semester, I was terrified again. I wished my parents hadn't sent me to New Village. I didn't tell my parents how I felt though, because the reason they wanted me to go here was so I would learn to be more confident in situations like this.

I'M SLOWLY IMPROVING

Mr. Shin made us create agendas for these presentations that would outline all the things we were going to talk about. I knew I would be able read from

my agenda, so I didn't practice. But when I started and saw everyone staring at me I was nervous again. I did my best to speak loudly and I made sure to stand up this time. I did OK, but my friends said I was so red that I looked like a tomato. My parents and teacher said I spoke clearly and answered the questions well but I should have prepared more, because I finished my presentation in 15 minutes when I was supposed to speak for an hour. I spent the rest of the time answering questions from everyone. I learned my lesson. Next time I will spend more time preparing.

Last summer, I didn't like the idea of going to an all-girls school that put so much emphasis on public speaking. But now I realize that my parents made a good decision sending me to New Village. At the beginning of the year Mr. Shin told my parents I didn't talk much in class, but now I'm not afraid to ask questions. My hope is that I become more confident in school. It's hard to believe that I'm the same person.



Kari has learned not to let her shyness hold her back from being successful.

Who are you jealous of?

1ST PLACE \$50

A girl from a rich family

By Susan Cifuentes
Hollywood HS

If I said I have never felt jealous of anyone, I would be lying. There have been times when I felt a tiny hint of jealousy toward some girl's luscious hair or someone's new computer, but the time I really felt envious was when I was about 10. Ever since I can remember, going to college has been my biggest goal. Going to college was a sure way to secure my future to be a successful person in life. But I knew I had to study hard and get good grades.

I come from a low-income family and every day is another day of hard work. My mom cleans houses for a living and whenever I can, I go help her. She cleans these grand houses, the ones that are on the edge of the beach. The first time I entered, I was blown away by everything. That house screamed

money! From that moment, I vowed I was going to do everything I could to live a comfortable life. And then, I met Olivia.

She is a couple years younger than me but at the start I knew she was a very active person. She was up in her room playing with her American Girl doll. I knocked timidly, telling her that my mom sent me up to tell her we were going to clean her room. She answered with a smile and told me that she would go to the game room to not bother us. When she left, I looked around her room and was astounded yet again. I probably looked like those dummies with my mouth wide open. The only thing I could see was bright pink and brown walls. There was only one bed with its own canopy. There was a huge closet

and toys all over the room. It looked nothing like my room, which I had to share with my sister and there was barely any room for anything. When I finished gawking at her room, I went to find my mother. The girl popped up and asked me if I cared to join her tea party. She actually said those exact words. I stammered that I would have to ask my mother. I didn't know why but she made me feel intimidated. I ended up playing with her.

I learned a lot about Olivia. I learned that she was in the third grade. She had a lot of toys and really liked dogs. She had a younger brother who was at the park. But the thing that stuck was that she was taking some classes. She took ballet, art, singing and flute. She had a lot of after-school activities, so she

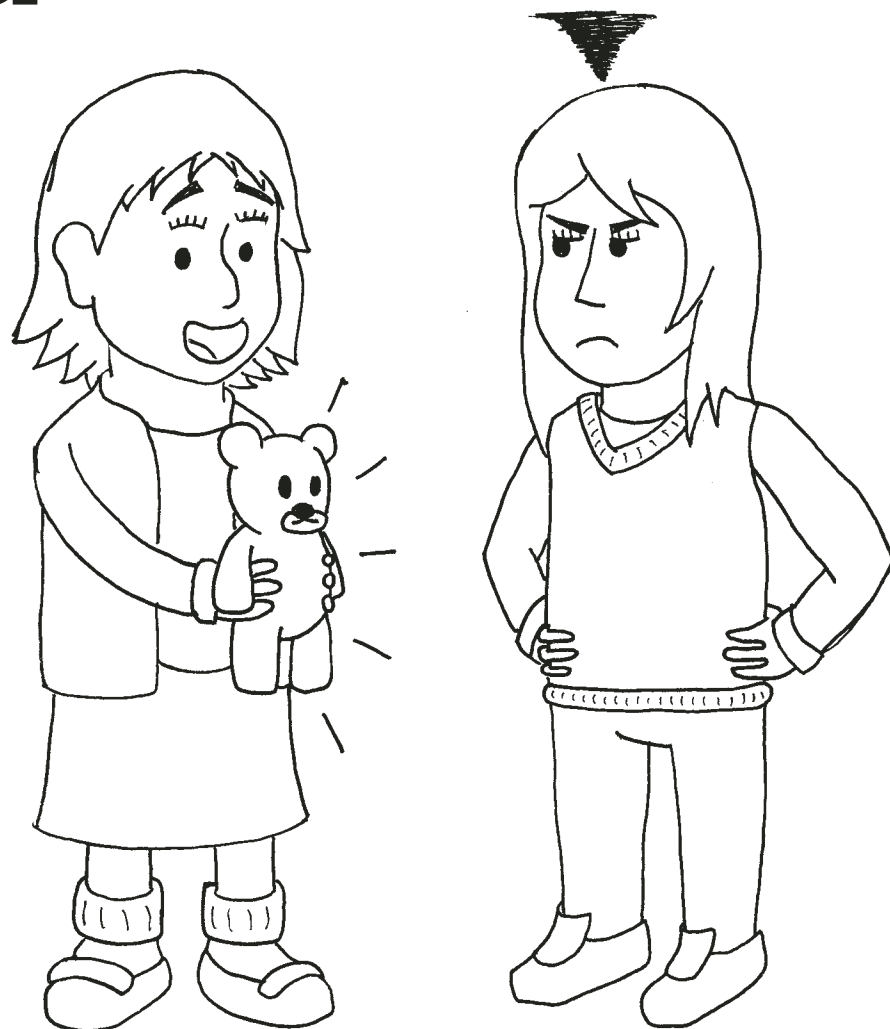


Illustration by Austin Skootsky, 17, Hamilton HS

was a very busy girl. Her life was so different than mine. I mean, while I was doing homework and baby-sitting my younger sister, she was learning how to dance. She had so many opportunities.

Right then, I knew I was jealous. Not of her personally, but of what she had. She had everything any person could want and more. But it was deeper than that. For me, trying to get into a four-year university was my goal and a full-time job. Anything lower than that would be a failure so I always have to be focused and determined. For her it seemed more of a requirement and didn't need a lot of effort. While I was struggling to understand math by myself, she could hire a private tutor to help her. Her world contained so many opportunities. What I really was jealous of was that some people have it easy compared to others.

Now, whenever I'm thinking of that house on the shore of Malibu, I remember my goals and try to never stray off the path I'm making. Every grade and every extracurricular activity I do is a step closer to college and hopefully one day I too will have my dream house.

2ND PLACE \$30

A gay teen's supportive parents

Author's name withheld

Back in 2009, I came out to my family. My parents ignored me, treated me differently and were disappointed in me. Like most Hispanic parents, they don't accept their child when they come out to them. The feeling of abandonment, neglect and hate is unbearable. I still hear the disgust in their voices and see the hate in their eyes.

In 2010 my parents kicked me out and none of my aunts, uncles—no one—tried to help me. To them my parents were doing the right thing. I spent three nights with my friend Jose. Jose is gay and his parents accepted him with open arms. They threw him a "Coming Out" party. I was the one in charge of keeping Jose out of the house until they were ready. I was jealous of him because he has loving parents. His family accepted him and let me stay with them until my parents came looking for me. Nothing would make me happier than to have loving parents, a safe home and especially understanding parents. I wish I had a life like his. I know my family will eventually come to accept me for who I am but who knows if I'll still be here.

3RD PLACE \$20

A girl who went to lots of parties

By Daisy Avena

Paramount HS

As teenagers we feel like everything our parents do is to try to make us miserable or not let us have any fun. In reality, they are just trying to protect us. That's a lesson I had to learn the hard way.

As a freshman I would see a lot of my friends go out, party and do many things my mom didn't let me do. That made me jealous. I had a friend named Courtney* who would go to a party every weekend. She drank and smoked and would come to school on Monday and tell me all about it. She would tell me about all the

boys who wanted her, and I would just sit there and listen. She would invite me to go out with her but I knew I couldn't go; my mom was way too strict. I was jealous that her parents didn't care where she was, what time she got home or even if she went home at all.

One day it all changed. She came to class upset and I asked her what was wrong and she wouldn't tell me. Courtney started being absent a lot and stopped coming to school for a long period of time. Finally, one day she came back and with her was a baby bump. Courtney was pregnant. I was in shock. I never would have imagined this happening.

When I told my mom, she said, "I told you she was up to no good." I felt so relieved that my mom was caring and worried about me. She wasn't strict because she didn't want me to have fun, but because she wanted the best for me. I learned that being jealous of my friend's freedom was dumb because that could have been me who ended up pregnant.

** The friend's name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

HONORABLE MENTION

People who have siblings

Author's name withheld

In my family, it's just my dad, my mom and me. Yup! I'm the only child. It's very tough to be the only child, having all the attention and focus on you. A lot of people think that being the only child makes me get whatever I want. I always reply to them with a straight-to-the-point, "No." I had to work for the things I wanted, I had to maintain my grades and behave well. Sometimes I wished there were other people my parents would pay attention to, not only me, so at least some pressure was taken off.

Once in a while, my friends complain about how their siblings annoy them so much. They tell stories of their brother or sister bossing them around the house, teasing them, and telling on them to their parents. Even though their stories seem like something I too would get very mad at, secretly I wish I had what they did. I am indeed quite jealous.

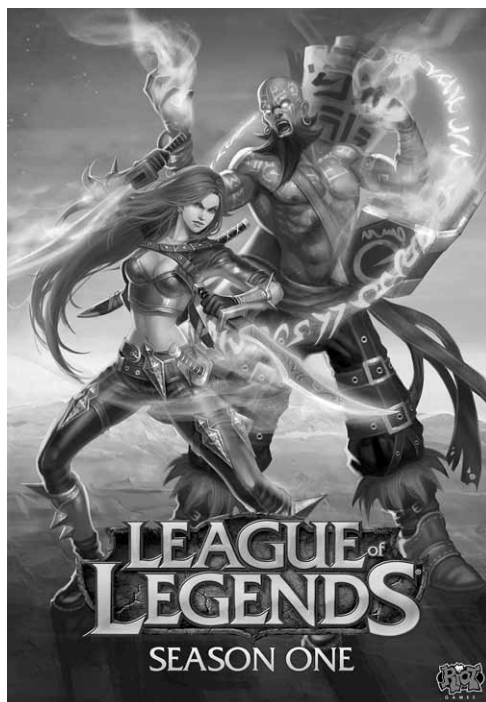
I've always wanted a brother or a sister, ideally an older one. I always mention to my friends that I want one and they reply with an "OMG! No don't say that! You'll regret it" or "You want

mine?" They say that I'm lucky to be the only child, but I'm pretty sure that if they were in my position they would want the same thing. They don't know how it feels to be the "only" one. It does get pretty lonely you see. You don't really have anyone to talk to at home and you worry about who's going to be there with you once your parents are gone.

My friend from freshman year had a terrible accident during PE when we were playing Frisbee one time. A guy from the opposing team crashed into her and her forehead started bleeding a whole lot. They eventually called her brother out of class to wait and take care of her until their mom arrived. I thought it was so cute that he tried to calm her down; it was such a heartfelt moment. The connection they had was what I would call ... priceless. I was very jealous knowing that I would never have such a relationship with someone I can call my "brother."

There was also a time when my friend told me that she spent the weekend with her sister. They went shopping and all that good girly stuff. I always imagined that if I did have an older sister, I would tell her everything and we would have a ton of fun! She would be the person I trusted the most, the one that I'd ask for help when I need it.

I overcome my jealousy by surrounding myself with great friends who I can treat as my long lost siblings. I hope they'll always be there with me through everything because I know I need them.



League of Legends

Reviewed by Andrew Chen
16, Walnut HS

I spend half of most weekends working with my friends to crush other players into the ground playing my favorite game, League of Legends.

League of Legends is a free, online role-playing game. Two teams of up to five people choose characters, or "Champions," and are thrust into a sprawling battlefield, where their goal is to destroy the opposing team's base.

Though I love playing with friends, sometimes teamwork is a burden. One game, my team was at our opponent's base and ready to destroy it. However, one of our teammates wasn't near us. We urged him to hurry up and group with us. Unfortunately, he took his time and we were ambushed and lost the battle.

I picked up the basics of the game—right click to move and attack, keyboard for special attacks and spells—within a few days. However, learning enough to win can take weeks when playing against skilled opponents. The first time I played against human opponents I was destroyed and bombarded with insults from all the other players.

There are more than 100 Champions to choose from. My favorite is Ahri, a nine-tailed fox who can dash around the battlefield and charm opponents, stopping them in their tracks so you can attack them.

You can buy new Champions or "Runes," artifacts that you equip on your Champion for extra damage or speed, using in-game currency. For real money, you can buy skins, which customize your Champions' looks and voice.

The producers of League of Legends update the game with new items, Champions and maps every few weeks. League of Legends can be addictive and bring out the worst in other people. But it's fun and a great way to build teamwork with your friends.



Halo 4

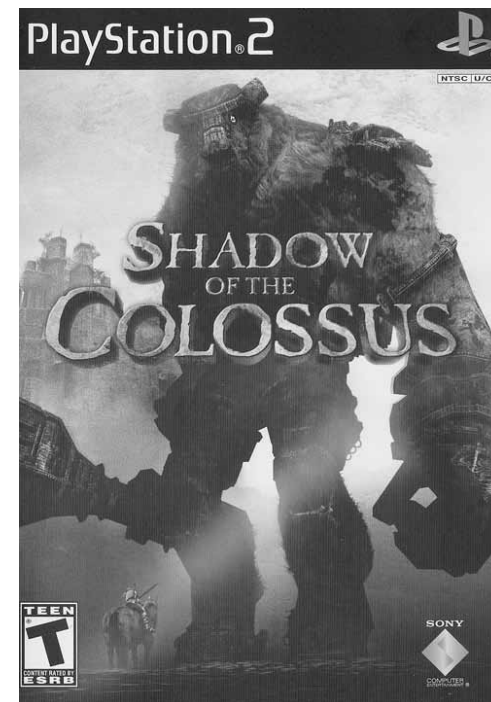
Reviewed by David Zacarias
16, Roosevelt HS

When I first got Halo 4 for Xbox 360, I stayed up all night playing and my mom got mad at me. It took me four days to complete the game. The graphics are epic! When I played Halo 3 after Halo 4, I realized that the graphics weren't as cool as I thought back in 2007. The Halo 4 graphics are so life-like; it looks like the characters in the in-game scenes are real actors.

Halo 4 starts off four years after the war has ended on Earth. Master Chief wakes up on a prison planet along with an enemy, Didact, who wants to annihilate the human race. Master Chief also seeks a path to Earth to help his AI, Cortana, who is dying. What really pulled me into the story is the way they got Master Chief to seem more human and emotional. They make it look like he's attached to Cortana more now that she's dying.

Halo 4's multiplayer has been stepped up to a new level with new weapons and upgrades. The thruster pack is like running but it throws you about the same distance, so it's useless in my opinion. One of the most useful upgrades is Promethean Vision, which lets you spot enemies behind objects or in the fog. There is also a customizable weapons list that lets you choose your weapons for an online battle, which is an idea from Modern Warfare. And there have been adjustments to the controller settings. I found it easy to get used to these controls.

If you're reading this, get this game! If your parents say it's too violent ... it is, but it's still worth playing.



Shadow of the Colossus

Reviewed by Derek Mejia
16, Roosevelt HS

Shadow of the Colossus is an action-adventure game for the Playstation 2. Even though it's an old game it's still worth a try. Someone told me that the game was hard so I wasn't sure that I was going to like it. It was hard, I'll admit, because the game gives you few hints about the story. But as it went on I was hooked.

You play as Wander, who is on a journey to resurrect Mono, a mysterious girl who is dead or in a trance. To save Mono, Wander rides his horse Agro to battle these enormous creatures called colossi that are in the form of animals or human-like beings. The game is like a puzzle in which you have to discover the weakness of each colossi. After beating one colossi I wanted to go onto the next one to see what it looked like and how I would battle it. I once took three hours on one colossi. It didn't have fur that I could grab onto to climb up to his head and reach his weak point. I got frustrated, so I went on YouTube and looked up a tutorial on how to fight it.

My favorite colossi to battle was the bird-like Avion. What struck me was how beautiful the battle was. As I was running across his body, he was flying above a lake and these remains of a structure. It looks like a painting. This game convinced me that video games are an art form because at one point I'd be frustrated and at another I was amazed by the visuals.

This game isn't a first-person shooter like Call of Duty and some people might think it's dumb, but it's just as good. Plus you get to ride on a horse. I mean, how cool is that?

FOSTER THE PEOPLE

TORCHES



Foster the People

CD: Torches

Reviewed by Frank Gaspar

15, The School of Arts and Enterprise (Pomona)

As a fan of indie rock, I was instantly hooked on Foster the People's song "Pumped Up Kicks." I liked how Mark Foster used the microphone to make his voice sound like an intercom, which I had never heard in a song before. My aunt, who's also an indie rock fan, suggested that I listen to more of their songs, and after I heard "Helena Beat," I bought the rest of the album.

One of my favorite things about their album is that I never knew what to expect. I really like "Waste" because the tune and the lyrics help me feel relaxed, putting aside stress from school and home whenever I hear them. "I'll help you see it through 'cause I just really want to be with you."

Whenever I hear "Life on the Nickel," its catchy rhythm makes me feel like dancing. I can also relate to the lyrics because they say "I'm not quite there, but I'm close." They tell me that it's OK to stand out. Things like dying my hair or making creepy sketches of zombies in class while others are doodling can seem weird to everyone. But as long as they make sense to me, I don't care what people think.

My favorite song is "Houdini." The tune is trippy and makes me feel like I'm being hypnotized. I also really like the message in the chorus, "raise up to your ability." It makes me feel like what I'm capable of is not what people expect, and I can surprise them. If you like music that's unpredictable and has unique melodies, then I highly recommend Torches.

I can also relate to the lyrics because they say "I'm not quite there, but I'm close." They tell me that it's OK to stand out.



Deadmau5

CD: > album title goes here <

Reviewed by Ted Zhu

16, Walnut HS

Electronic music has never appealed to me. Sure, I've heard Skrillex on the radio and thought the music had a catchy beat, but electronic music always makes me think of eardrum-busting noise at a rave. However, when one of my friends played me a song from Deadmau5's newest album, > album title goes here <, I surprisingly enjoyed it.

I immediately went on YouTube and listened to all 13 tracks. With a strangely named album, Joel Zimmerman (Deadmau5's real name), opened my eyes (and ears) to another kind of music.

What impressed me most about this album is the variety. "The Veldt" is still electronic, but the song's instrumentals create a slow, peaceful Owl City-esque feeling. "Professional Griefers" provides an alternative rock dimension to the album.

The song that surprised me the most was "Fn Pig" because it seemed to tell a story. I listen to classical music sometimes and in every piece, I hear a storyline with ups and downs. The slow, melancholy sound in the beginning of "Fn Pig" painted a calm scene and the eventual buildup to a strong beat in the second half pumped me up with its energetic vibes.

Not every song is great though. The quick tempo on "Channel 42" got me hooked ... for a while. But halfway through the five-minute song, I felt like it needed something new to keep me interested.

> album title goes here < broke many stereotypes for me about electronic music. After listening to this album, I've since explored other artists such as Zomboy, Swedish Mafia, and Figure and enjoyed them.

What impressed me most about this album is the variety.



Two Door Cinema Club

CD: Beacon

Reviewed by Melissa Nuñez

17, Warren HS (Downey)

Ever since I listened to Irish band Two Door Cinema Club's first album Tourist History, which was released in 2010, I've been a huge fan. I was so excited when I heard they were releasing a second album that I immediately pre-ordered it. I had high expectations after Tourist History and Beacon didn't fail me.

"Handshake" is one of the songs I got to hear live when I went to see the band at the Wiltern last September. Even now, as soon as it starts playing I get goosebumps and feel like I'm hearing it live again. You first hear the bass, drums and guitar, then the lyrics begin, "So what became of loving man/ And what became of you? Familiar as you shook my hand/ What was it you meant to do?" The song makes me feel like I'm in a trance.

Two Door Cinema Club songs make you sing along even if you don't mean to. "Sun" does this with its soothing tempo. The first time I heard it I started to sing along on "Though I'm far away/ I know I'll stay I know I'll stay/ Right there with you" because it's catchy.

"Sleep Alone" became an instant favorite of mine. The lyrics are relatable: "He needs no army where he's headed/ 'cause he knows/ That they're just ghosts/ And they can't hurt him if he can't see them." It sends the message that you might think you need help but you really don't.

I can listen to Beacon for hours and not get tired of it. That makes me love Two Door Cinema Club even more.

Two Door Cinema Club songs make you sing along even if you don't mean to.

25 Years of Covering Los Angeles from a Teen Perspective

Dear Friends,

Tough economic times, foundation cuts and moving our office by March 1, 2013, have overburdened our budget and placed an undue amount of financial strain on the L.A.Youth family. While we celebrate our 25th anniversary this month we are regrettably closing the doors on this extraordinary organization at the end of February. This is our last edition of L.A.Youth.

A 25-year history produces an extensive body of relationships, memories and feelings. From the first group of teens writing stories on an old typewriter around my kitchen table, we moved to Saturday editorial meetings at the senior citizen center in West L.A. and finally our own space in the mid-Wilshire neighborhood. While I have the honor to write this letter, credit for L.A.Youth's success is widely shared. Most important to me, I must recognize the colleagues with whom I have worked with at L.A.Youth. Together, we trained thousands of teens in writing, editing and critical thinking about issues relevant to their lives.

Every month more than 400,000 readers—teens, teachers, parents and civic leaders—read the compelling stories published in L.A.Youth and posted online.

While most teen writing was tedious and uninvolved, L.A.Youth had to be different. We put the emphasis on personal journalism, meaning lots of stories starting with the word "I." We filled our pages with pieces that were heartbreaking or uplifting or funny, but always painfully honest. Our writers were encouraged to express their feelings; we wanted their voices to shine through. Instead of traditional newspaper style, our stories would be narratives, each with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Here are some highlights of our extraordinary accomplishments:

- We launched the Foster Youth Writing and Education Project in 2003
- More than 1,200 teachers used the newspaper every month in their classrooms
- We hosted a dozen public forums featuring teen reporters and community leaders
- Teen writers shared their personal stories about growing up on skid row, life in a juvenile detention facility, the impact of poverty on their lives, lack of mental health services, inadequate public schools and many other relevant topics

- Stories were reprinted in the Los Angeles Times, the Daily News, Time, Western Journal of Medicine and other publications
- Our stories were adapted for NPR's Morning Edition and Marketplace

Some of our most heartfelt writing is in response to the essay contests that we feature in every issue. The contests are based

on questions like "What would you do to change the world?" or "Tell us about your favorite teacher." Once, we posed this challenge: "Write a letter to Mom and Dad. What would you like to tell your parents but have been afraid or embarrassed to share?" They wrote to us about their sexuality, abusive parents, poverty, being incarcerated and other painful events in their lives.

The role of our organization in all this was to coach and nurture the teens at L.A.Youth, to recognize the value of their ideas and guide each through weeks or months of writing and rewriting until a compelling story emerges. It can be a slow, arduous journey, the teen writer sitting side-by-side with an editor, carefully

scrolling through paragraphs on a computer screen and then trying to make them better. A few stories have taken up to a year before they're ready for publication. I jokingly refer to them as "the most expensive stories ever published." But I tell myself it is worth the wait; after all, it takes courage to write something that you know thousands of readers will be judging.

The newspaper business is changing. It's a grim picture: fewer readers, the decline of advertising dollars and layoffs in newsrooms across the country. The Internet is the new frontier. Yet, with all the hand-wringing about the future of print media, L.A.Youth is in huge demand. Why?

Because we're a necessary idea. Young voices in journalism are so important. It's one thing for a student to read a textbook chapter on immigrant rights—another to read a first-person account written by another teen. Beyond that, youth-produced media moves the discourse among teens from apolitical to activist.

My dream was to publish an excellent teen-written newspaper. It was fulfilled. We leave confident that the legacy is strong and hopeful. Perhaps we moved the world a bit in the right direction. We are confident our struggle was successful.

Donna C. Myrow

Donna C. Myrow, Executive Director



Executive Director Donna Myrow

